

## The Little Bird in My Chest

I'm isolated. I'm safe.

And yet --

I lie awake at night. At first, my thoughts come quietly. I want to help. I lazily walk myself through some things to do. "Maybe I could try to sew some masks tomorrow." "I could run some errands for someone in need." "I could donate a few dollars."

My brain trips, as if flipping a switch.

The thoughts start to pour in noisily, like a Rainey Street bar at 10pm. "My sewing machine is still broken -- can I sew masks by hand?" "Are local craft stores still open? Can I cut up old t-shirts to make them?" "What if the store runs out of coffee filters? Is there something else we can use?" "What if I accidentally infect someone while volunteering to run errands?" "What if I infect my husband?" "What happens if one of us gets infected?" "And who should I be donating money to, anyway? I've seen at least 100 social posts in the last three days in the community help group." "How do I pick? *Who* do I pick? *How could anyone possibly pick?*"

My thoughts come thunderously loud as I stare at the fan swirling and buzzing above my bed. My breath turns shallow and short. "What are we going to do?" "What are we *all* going to do?" "How will we ever get through this?" "Who is in charge?" "When will this end?" "Will things ever be the same again?"

I can feel a tiny bird trapped helplessly inside my chest and the weight of the entire Texas sky upon my breast. The bird hastily flutters to find an escape. I feel the flaps of panic in my heart, my lungs, my throat. I must fight to keep the pressure of the thick air above me from driving my breast into my chest and crushing the little bird. It takes all of my will.

I lay, staring.

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Jessica Frye  
Manor, TX  
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